

INCORPORATING CHARACTERS INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A LESSON PLANNING

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Abstract: The research is aimed at developing a lesson plan incorporating characters into English language teaching (ELT). It is generally found that incorporating characters into ELT comes with an unsatisfied result. A systematic lesson planning was carried out to prevent from language skills negligence and to promote character building. The lesson plans share the specific characteristics in which: (a) the kinds of character are selected on the basis of need analysis; (b) during classroom implementation, the characters are inserted in between the steps of English language instruction; (c) the goals of teaching are made explicit for both language teaching and character building;; (d) language contents and teaching media were selected to fit with characters being developed and the types of text recommended by the national ELT curriculum; (e) characters assessments are made specific on the basis of character indicators. With this minimal effort, a further lesson planning is required to fully meet teachers' expectation.

Keywords: *characters, lesson planning, ELT, integration, lesson plans*

Introduction

Incorporating characters into the subject of teachings, including ELT is mandatory for Indonesian teachers. It is officially recommended by the government, and explicitly formulated in national curriculum. A similar policy was made by the government in 2005 by issuing a decree no. 19, year 2005, stating that all educational units at secondary junior and senior high schools may integrate life skills in their subjects of teaching; the characters as promoted by the government are basically life skills that fall into a specific category of life skills, i.e., soft skills

The policies were not immediately responded by the schools in the country. A good initiative was taken by educational practitioners from universities by organizing seminars and conferences on the issues of character education. Some seminars rest in conceptualization of character education in the schools and higher education (see, for example Sudrajat (2011); Wardani (2010); and Suryaman (2010); some others went further into organizing research under the heading of character education. For examples, Cahyono (2010) designed qualitative research on the implementation of character education across the schools in East Java; Zuchdi, Prasetya, and Siasah (2010) developed research and development on character education integrated into the elementary school subjects; and Khusniati (2012) designed research on the implementation of character education through science subjects. The research provides some basic information on how character education should be implemented in schools; what approach should be adopted, and; how characters education should be incorporated into the subjects of teaching.

Learning from the existing research activities, specific research is required on how a lesson plan should be developed. Until recently, lesson planning is neglected from teacher training and professional development. Consequently, most teachers have no sufficient skills on developing it.

Addressing the issues of character education, the research offers a procedure of lesson planning on characters incorporated into the subject of teaching. It is expected that English teachers have an alternative in developing a lesson plan incorporating characters into their subject of teaching.

Review of Related Literatures

Defining Characters

Dewey (1922 in Althof & Berkowitz, 2006: 497) defines character as “the ‘interpenetration of habits’ and the effect of consequences of actions upon such habits.” The definition suggests that character is not given but it is made or built. Building particular characters on the part of students, therefore, has a good room in our educational enterprises.

Characters are basically life skills that may fall into a category of ‘soft skills’. A further exploration towards the kinds of soft skills leads us to conclude that characters are basically soft skills. The following characters are soft skills that are quite common in some literatures: Creative thinking, Critical thinking, Empathy, Leadership, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Trustworthiness (see for examples, Wilhelm 2002; and Washington State University, 2010).

Incorporating Characters into ELT

Constructing a lesson plan incorporating characters may be a bit tricky since it has to achieve two goals of learning: developing language skills and characters. Both should be simultaneously developed during classroom sessions. In other words, each objective is not predominating over the other. Anticipating this problem, Hopson & Sally (1981) and Power (2006) offer a solution that characters, like life skills, may be incorporated through the selection of teaching materials and activities fitting with the kinds of characters being developed.

Dealing with teaching materials, they should be selected to appropriately fit with the students' experience, prior knowledge, capacity and interest. Added to this, the selection of teaching material is in accordance with the type of texts recommended by the ELT curriculum, that is: short functional texts, narrative texts, descriptive texts, or recount text.

Lesson planning

Lesson planning is simply defined as activities to construct a lesson plan. Meanwhile, the term "lesson plan" refers to a set of activities for teaching (Brown, 2007, p. 395), a description or outline for teaching (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 2010, p. 163), or a unit of study (Stringer, Christensen, and Baldwin (2010, p. 33).

Constructing a lesson plan is not merely completing a grid of available lesson plans. It is a long and continuous process that may range from pre-planning activities, planning or constructing activities, using a lesson plan to evaluating the lesson plan (see Ur, 1991; Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2001; Farrell in Richards and Renandya. 2002; Harmer, 2007; and Stringer, Christensen, and Baldwin, 2010).

Pre-planning cover the following activities: (1) Identifying students' experience, interest, prior knowledge, capacity; (2) Analyzing the existing curriculum; (3) Learning format of lesson plan (Ur, 1991); (4) Identifying resources and media. Next, Planning activities include the following activities: (1) writing learning objectives; (2) Deciding activities or procedures; (3) Selecting or developing materials or resource (4) developing an assessment. Moving to implementation of the lesson plan in classroom settings, the following activities are recommended: (1) monitoring lesson variety and lesson pacing; and (2) Making immediate adjustment to the original plan. Afterwards, assessing lesson plan by carrying out the activities that follow: (1) developing criteria and aspect of evaluation, and; 2) making personal reflection (teachers or students).

Other experts tend to develop a guideline of lesson planning rather than to develop a procedure of lesson planning (see for example, Hadley, 2001, and; Brown, 2007). By the guideline, it means principles to follow. Regardless of school levels, lesson plans for language teaching can be constructed to follows those guideline.

Method

To construct a lesson plan and to identify its applicability, a research and development was adopted. The research comprises three major stages: exploration, development or construction, and field tryout.

At the exploration stage, general theories of lesson planning were reviewed, 15 lesson plans were analyzed, 17 questionnaires were distributed, an expert was invited to put forward his opinion, and 12 classrooms were observed. Then, at the development stage, a draft of lesson plan was constructed by taking into account some suggestions from the expert. Afterwards, the lesson plan was tried out in the field in which an expert and two observers were invited to put forward their opinion and evaluation. Finally, some parts of lesson plan (such as characters and language skill assessment) were consulted with the other expert.

The research involved junior secondary school teachers, school principals, and the students at six purposively selected schools in Central Java. In addition to this, three experts from different three different universities were invited to state their opinions.

Findings and Discussion

The kinds of characters frequently incorporated and mostly perceived important for the students

There are 15 kinds of characters explicitly incorporated into ELT in the lesson plans: trustworthiness, communication, problem solving, decision making, respect, diligence, courage, responsibility, religiosity, discipline, curiosity, hardworking, self-reliance, collaborative working, critical and creative thinking, self-confidence, and caring. However, there are only 10 characters claimed by the teachers intentionally incorporated into ELT and three are 7 kinds of characters empirically incorporated during classroom sessions: communication, collaborative work, courage, discipline, religiosity, and honesty. Of 7 kinds of characters, communication and collaborative work are the most frequent characters incorporated into ELT. Furthermore, there are three characters mostly perceived important for the students as rated from the questionnaires: trustworthiness, and responsibility, and creative thinking. The accumulated rating from the questionnaires can be presented below:

Table 1: The Kinds of Characters Mostly Perceived Important

No	Characters	Not important	Less important	Important	Very important	Σ
		(x 0)	(x 1)	(x 2)	(x 3)	
1	Creative thinking	0	9	8	4	37
2	Critical thinking	0	11	9	1	32
3	Empathy	0	9	11	1	34
4	Leadership	0	10	10	1	33
5	Respect	0	10	10	1	33
6	Responsibility	0	6	10	5	41
7	Fairness	0	11	8	2	33
8	Caring	0	3	16	2	41
9	Trustworthiness	0	3	12	6	45

The table suggests that the teachers may develop all characters for their students by incorporating them into ELT. However, **trustworthiness**, **caring**, and **responsibility** should be prioritized over the others. In other words, whenever possible, they should be incorporated into their subjects (ELT). As the theory implies, they may be incorporated through process or content.

Procedures of lesson planning

Lesson planning incorporating characters into ELT involved experts, teachers, and students. The experts play as evaluator and consultant at planning, instruction, and assessment stage; the teachers play as classroom session manager, and observer, and; the students play as subject of teaching. In general, the process of lesson planning is described in the following figure.

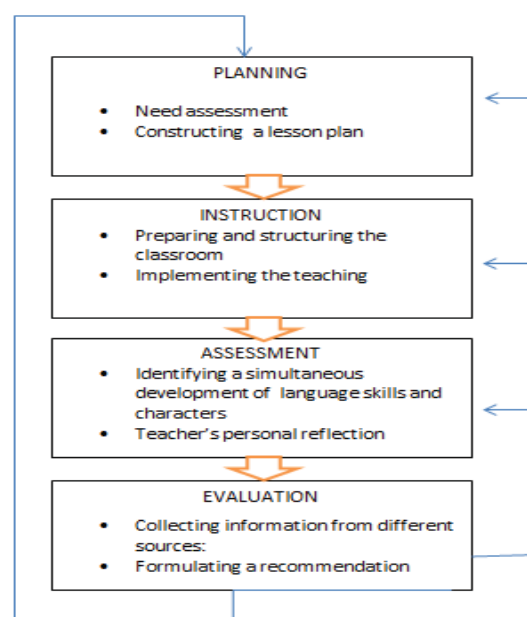
Figure 1: The process of lesson planning

Generally lesson plans were constructed through three phases of lesson planning: Planning, Instruction, and Assessment. The emphasis was given on the characters that are formulated in the teaching goals, indicators, selection of teaching materials and activities, and the explicit assessment of characters through peers' observation and teacher's personal reflection, and an expert's evaluation. A successful lesson planning incorporating characters was indicated with a simultaneous development of both language skills and target characters.

In addition to this, an evaluation of lesson planning was conducted by collecting information from the three stages above. It is aimed at identifying the weaknesses and the strength of the procedure.

The specific features of lesson plan

A lesson plan incorporating characters into ELT shares the following properties: (1) the kinds of character are selected on the basis of need analysis; (2) they are explicitly formulated in the goal of teaching in addition to language teaching; (3) language contents and teaching media were selected to fit with characters being developed and the types of text recommended by the national ELT curriculum; (4) the core teaching activities are sequenced to follow four steps of genre-based learning cycles, in which characters are inserted in between, and; (5) characters assessments are made specific on the basis of character indicators.



Conclusion and Suggestion

Having analyzed and, later, validated the data, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The kinds of characters officially recommended by the government are not always perceived important for their students; the teachers tend to have their own choices and priority.

2. A lesson plan incorporating characters into ELT was constructed by following a general procedure of lesson planning: planning, instruction, and assessment. A little modification was made on several aspects: (1) before, during, and after construction, the lesson plans were consulted and evaluated by the experts; (2) during classroom sessions, other teachers were involved in process of evaluation, and (3) teachers' personal reflection became a source of evaluation.
3. The procedure offers a specific feature of lesson plan that potentially develop language skills and characters.

The following recommendations are put forward for further the betterment of lesson planning. First, field tryout should be conducted in more than one school and more than three times. Second, to judge the feasibility of the lesson plan, teachers should collect the data from different sources. Third, the kinds of characters should be carefully selected on the basis of students' need.

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